

# THE BREAKING POINT

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

Author of "Dangerous Days," "X," "The Amazing Interlude," and many other striking and successful novels.

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## WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY

**DR. DAVID LIVINGSTON**, chief physician in Norada, a small town, dental but dentist by trade, a severe, censorious, idealistic but benevolent man, beloved by everybody in town.

**DR. JAMES WHEELER**, in some measure there is a man who is determined some day to go home to Norada, his child-hunting days behind him, but he is full of vitality and is busily looking out for opportunities to help and protect others. He is in love with **ELIZABETH WHEELER**, a wholesome girl who loves him very sincerely.

**SEVERAL MONTHS AGO**, when ten years before, was mixed up in a curious case, Dr. David's son, Lucy, had been accused of being the author of a certain book which was about to be published.

**DR. GREGORY**, Norada's brother and manager whose researches have him up.

**LORIS BASSETT**, a newspaperman, who suspects that Dick is responsible for Lucy's death.

**Mrs. E. G. GABLE**, Mrs. Gable's mother, who is very wise.

**LESLIE WARD**, Elizabeth's best friend.

**Mrs. AND MRS. WHEELER**, David's parents.

**WILLIE SAYRE**, a rich young fellow who really selects another whose has to marry him with whom he is smitten.



"There's something the matter with you; You've got something on your mind."

"Well, I have and I haven't. I'd like to see Lucy, David. If she's about."

"Lucy's gambling. You can tell me if you can tell her. What is it? Is it about Dick?"

"In a way, yes."

"He's married?"

"No. He's all right, as far as I know. I guess I'd better tell you. David, Walter Wheeler has got some sort of bee in his bonnet, and he got me to come on. Dick was pretty tired and—well one or two things happened to worry him. One was that Jim Wheeler—you'll get this sooner or later—in an automobile accident, and it did him."

Dick lost some of his ruddy color. It was a moment before he spoke.

"Poor Jim," he said hoarsely. "He was a good boy, only full of life. It will be hard on the family."

David was silent again. When his friends were in trouble he wanted to know about it. He was somewhat indignant and not a little hurt. But he soon recovered to Dick.

"I'll go back and send him off for a rest," he said. "I'm as good as I'll ever be, and the boy's tired. What's he been in Wheeler's bonnet?"

"Look here, David, you know your own business best, and Wheeler didn't feel at liberty to tell me very much. But he seemed to think you were the only one who could tell us certain things. He'd have come himself, but it's not easy for him to leave the family just now. Dick went away just after Jim's funeral. He left a young chap Reynolds in his place, and I believe, in order not to worry you, some letters to be mailed at intervals."

"Want where?" David asked in a terrible voice.

"To a town called Norada, in Wyoming. Near his old home somewhere. And the Wheelers haven't heard anything from him since the day he got Elizabeth the day he got there, and wired her at the same time. There's been nothing since."

David was gripping the arms of his chair with both hands, but he forced himself to calmness.

"I'll go to Norada at once," he said, "if you'll let me. I'm a fool."

"Yes," David said quickly. "Trust your friends to make every arrangement possible. You set the whole pack on his trail. And then he fell back in his chair, and gasped. "Open the window!"

When Lucy came in a half hour later, she found David on his bed with his eyes closed. He lay still beside him. And he could not go back to where he had left off. There was nothing to go back to but shame and remorse. He looked at Bassett, by the fire, and tried to fit in his place. "What would you say if I was here?" he asked. David nodded in a silent, slow, wearying movement.

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